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Advancement of women

Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/129, the present report reviews the activities undertaken by Member States and United Nations entities to improve the situation of women in rural areas and contains recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 66/129 on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report at its sixty-eighth session on the implementation of the resolution. In response to that request, the present report provides an assessment of the situation of rural women, highlighting the efforts of Member States, the United Nations system and other actors to address the obstacles and challenges that impede progress towards the economic empowerment of rural women and to enable them to improve their lives and livelihoods. It contains recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

2. A note verbale was circulated to all Member States and a letter was transmitted to United Nations entities soliciting contributions to the report. Replies were received from 20 Member States,[1] whose contributions were incorporated into the present report.

3. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012, Member States reiterated the importance of empowering rural women as critical agents for enhancing agricultural and rural development and food security and nutrition (resolution 66/288, annex, para. 109). The fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, held in 2012, focused on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges. Although the Commission's deliberations did not lead to the adoption of agreed conclusions, they brought international attention to the challenges faced by rural women. The political momentum that the Commission generated provided incentives to accelerate progress in the implementation of legal and policy frameworks benefiting rural women, including the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women.

II. Background

4. The world population is expected to increase by 2.4 billion from the current figure of approximately 7.2 billion, to 9.6 billion in 2050.[2] While less than half of the world's population currently lives in rural areas, estimates suggest that the total rural population will reach a peak between 2020 and 2025 and then start to decline. These global trends will be mostly driven by the dynamics of rural population growth in the less developed regions, which currently house more than 90 per cent of the world's rural population. While the number of people living in rural areas in developed countries steadily declined during the second half of the twentieth century, the rural population of the less developed regions has more than doubled since 1950 and will likely continue to grow until 2021.[3] However, there are regional differences. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean and in East and

[1] Contributions were received from Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Colombia, Cyprus, El Salvador, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Romania, Senegal, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey.

[2] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision* (New York, 2013).

[3] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision* (New York, 2012).

South-East Asia, the number of people living in rural areas is already declining, while forecasts suggest that in the Middle East and North Africa and in South and Central Asia, numbers will start to decline around 2025 and in sub-Saharan Africa by 2045.[4] By 2050 there will likely be 0.3 billion fewer rural inhabitants than today, while the projected number of people living in urban areas will be 6.3 billion.[3]

5. Despite the trend towards urbanization, extreme poverty remains a largely rural phenomenon. Of the 1.2 billion people (one fifth of the world's inhabitants) who cannot fulfil their most basic needs, about 800 million, or more than 65 per cent, live in rural environments.[5] According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank *Global Monitoring Report 2013*, the challenge of poverty reduction is primarily concentrated in rural areas of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa: 46 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's rural population lived on less than US$ 1.25 a day in 2008, compared with 34 per cent of its urban population. Three quarters of the poor in South Asia live in rural areas, and in East Asia the share of poor people living in rural settings is approximately five times higher than in urban areas.[6]

6. The persistence of rural poverty has influenced the performance of rural areas in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Recent IMF research suggests that more urbanized countries recorded greater success in attaining the Goals than less urbanized ones. Countries with a degree of urbanization greater than 60 per cent are expected to achieve 50 per cent more Goals than countries with a degree of urbanization of 40 per cent or less,[6] showing that economic agglomeration might play a role in increasing productivity, which can attract more firms and create more and better employment opportunities.

7. Rural women constitute one fourth of the world's population and play a critical role in supporting their households in achieving food and nutrition security, improving rural livelihoods and generating income and overall well-being. Rural women account for a significant proportion of the agricultural labour force, perform most of the unpaid care work and are key players in food production. In spite of this, rural women and girls face persistent structural constraints that prevent them from fully participating in socioeconomic and political life and contributing to the improvement of their lives, as well as those of others around them. Rural women and girls have restricted access to productive assets, such as land and other natural resources, agricultural inputs, credit and savings, extension services, information and technology, which in turn limits their potential as efficient economic players. Owing to cultural and, in some cases, legislative norms, discriminatory practices and security issues, they face more difficulties than men in gaining access to public services, social protection, decent employment opportunities and access to local and national markets and institutions. They are the most affected by malnutrition and hunger. Unpaid care work further hampers rural women's ability to take advantage of on- and off-farm employment and market opportunities in the agricultural sector.

8. Rural women are decision makers, producers in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and livestock, workers, entrepreneurs and service providers. Their contribution is vital to the well-being of families and communities, local and national economies

[4] International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), *Rural Poverty Report 2011* (Rome, 2010).

[5] IFAD, Rural Poverty Portal, www.ruralpovertyportal.org.

[6] IMF/World Bank, *Global Monitoring Report 2013: Rural-Urban Dynamics and the Millennium Development Goals* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2013).

and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. However, globally, and with only a few exceptions, rural women fare worse than rural men and urban women and men for every Millennium Development Goal indicator for which data are available.[7] The Goals created the opportunity for an unprecedented commitment to shaping a better and more just world. However, using national and global averages to measure achievement can mask much slower progress or even growing disparities at the subnational level and among specific populations, including men versus women and rural versus urban populations. Within this context, empowering rural women is critical for enhancing agricultural and rural development.

III. Empowerment of women in rural areas

A. Effective measures for inclusive agricultural growth

9. In its resolution 66/129, the General Assembly called for the creation of an enabling environment for improving the situation of rural women and ensuring systematic attention to their needs, priorities and contributions. To achieve this, it is crucial to design and implement policy instruments that make rural women's empowerment possible and address gender disparities and discrimination that exist across different sectors, including agriculture, rural development, forestry, fisheries, trade, finance, education, health and environment. As such, coherent and complementary policies are essential for rural women to fully enjoy their rights, as well as participate and take a lead in economic, social and political matters.

10. Rural women are not a homogeneous group, and their circumstances vary according to their access to productive assets, capabilities and opportunities and the extent to which they have a voice. Specific needs may subsist in relation to particular groups, such as indigenous women, female-headed households or women involved in agriculture, fishing or pastoralism, thus requiring institutions that are able to address this diversity in responding to rural women's needs and priorities with tailored approaches.

11. Supporting rural women's full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels is necessary for the creation of more representative institutions. In the case of the Plateforme régionale des organisations paysannes d'Afrique centrale, with the support of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the European Union, a significant group of rural women leaders were cultivated and trained for positions on management boards of cooperatives at the local, national, regional and continental levels.

12. In order to improve rural women's participation and take into consideration their needs, the Government of Italy, in collaboration with the Overseas Agronomic Institute in Florence, Italy, supported a programme for improving gender mainstreaming in activities related to rural development, food security, climate change and green growth, as well as building a body of knowledge and set of tools and methodologies for increasing women's economic and political empowerment and agency at the local and national levels. Lessons learned from the programme have been the foundation for the implementation of pilot initiatives with improved

[7] Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality Task Force on Rural Women, Facts and Figures: Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals (2012).

gender indicators within rural development programmes in Mozambique and Senegal.

13. Recognizing women as food producers, care providers and income-earning farmers involves addressing production constraints, including unequal access to productive resources, services, knowledge, credit and markets at all levels of decision-making related to food and nutrition security. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), IFAD and the World Food Programme (WFP) have agreed to spearhead a more comprehensive United Nations system response in support of rural women's economic empowerment through joint actions. Launched in 2012, Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women is a five-year joint programme being implemented in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda with the goal of securing rural women's livelihoods and rights in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. The programme is designed around four outcomes: rural women's improved food and nutrition security, rural women's increased income to sustain their livelihoods, rural women's enhanced leadership and participation in rural institutions and in shaping laws, policies and programmes, and a more gender-responsive policy environment for the economic empowerment of rural women. The programme has led to multi-stakeholder policy dialogue at the country level on issues faced by rural women and the development of country-level joint programmes and is a good illustration of how the United Nations can deliver as one to holistically address rural women's needs and priorities.

14. Enhancing rural women's capacity to take advantage of decent wage employment on- and off-farm requires improving agricultural wages and working conditions for women, addressing the burden of unpaid care work and promoting women as service providers, including in such non-traditional areas as green jobs and information and communications technology, through appropriate training. Several Member States reported on initiatives to improve the livelihoods of rural women. For instance, in Brazil a programme has been implemented with the aim of strengthening rural women's productive organizations through improved access to markets, management skills and social and political participation. Furthermore, minimum quotas for rural women have been implemented through affirmative action measures, such as in the case of the national agrarian reform and family agriculture fair, where at least 30 per cent of the participants must be represented by women's organizations.

15. Strengthening rural women's access to adequate financial services entails identifying policy solutions that can support the expansion of financial inclusion of rural women, taking advantage of new technologies that help to overcome barriers and reach segments of the population, in particular in rural areas that did not previously have access to banks.

16. Science and innovative technologies offer solutions to many of the challenges faced by rural women; they can contribute to food security by boosting crop yields, reduce women's unpaid care work by introducing labour-saving technologies and increase rural women's participation in economic activities overall. UN-Women and Airtel Africa, a telecommunications company, have partnered towards benefiting women farmers in the East and Horn of Africa regions with practical information-sharing tools through mobile networks. Under this partnership, Airtel Africa will

establish a farmer's information system, which will enable women farmers to access real-time information related to weather, changes to the policy environment (such as taxation and regulation) and available support services.

17. A knowledge base with sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators on access to and control over resources, assets and income, agricultural production, time use, leadership and participation is needed in order to better inform and provide guidance to policymakers and relevant stakeholders. The United States Agency for International Development, the International Food Policy Research Institute and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative collaboratively developed the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index. The Index, initially piloted in Bangladesh, Guatemala and Uganda, represents a significant innovation in its field and aims to increase understanding of the connections between women's empowerment, food security and agricultural growth while measuring the roles and extent of women's engagement in the agriculture sector in five domains: (a) decisions about agricultural productions; (b) access to and decision-making power over productive resources; (c) control over use of income; (d) leadership in the community; and (e) time use.

B. Access and control of land and other productive asset

18. In its resolution 66/129, the General Assembly called for ensuring that the rights of rural women are taken into account with regard to their equal access to and control of economic resources and financial services and full and equal rights to own and lease land and other property, including through the equal right to inheritance.

19. Women's equal rights to access to and control of land are recognized under international law (see General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex, art. 14), yet at the country level the persistence of discriminatory policies, laws, traditions and customs still prevents women's access to and ownership and control of key resources and the income arising from cultivation and other use of land. Not only do women have less access to land than men, but they are also often restricted to so-called secondary land rights, meaning that they hold such rights through male family members and thus risk losing such entitlements in case of divorce, widowhood or the migration of the male relative, particularly in rural contexts where access to land resources is key to livelihoods.[8] Global data indicate that women have equal property ownership rights in 115 countries and have equal inheritance rights in 93 countries.[9] However, gender disparities in land holdings persist in all regions.

20. For rural women and men, land is perhaps the most important household asset to support production and provide for food, nutrition and income security. Yet, an international comparison of agricultural census data shows that owing to a range of legal and cultural constraints in land inheritance, ownership and use, less than 20 per cent of landholders are women.[10] Women represent fewer than 5 per cent of all agricultural landholders in North Africa and West Asia, while across sub-Saharan

[8] FAO, "Gender and land rights", Economic and Social Perspectives Policy Brief No. 8 (Rome, 2010).

[9] UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2011-2012: In Pursuit of Justice* (2011).

[10] FAO, Gender and land rights database. Available from www.fao.org/gender/landrights/en/.

Africa, South Asia and South-East Asia the average is 19, 12 and 15 per cent respectively.[11] In order to help address the ongoing disparities around land, in May 2012 the Committee on World Food Security officially endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. The Guidelines embrace gender equality as one of the main guiding principles of implementation and stress the importance of compliance in all programmes, policies and technical assistance to improve governance of tenure and the international human rights framework.

21. With the aim of providing detailed guidance to legislators and policymakers, as well as civil society organizations and other stakeholders, in supporting the adoption and effective implementation of laws, policies and programmes to successfully respect, protect and fulfil women's rights to land and other productive resources, UN-Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights are in the process of producing a handbook, "Effective strategies to realize women's rights to land and other productive resources", based on an expert group meeting held in 2012. FAO, in consultation with national statistics authorities, universities, civil society organizations and others institutions, developed a gender and land rights database to offer up-to-date information on how men and women differ in their legal rights and access to land. Similarly, some Member States have conducted surveys and studies to better understand the gender component in obtaining access to land and holding land rights.

22. In Spain, with the entry into force of a law on shared ownership of farms, both spouses and domestic partners are considered owners of the agricultural products derived from farming activities, thus recognizing the joint management of the farm, together with the rights and obligations arising from such management, including administration, representation and exploitation responsibility shared between the two owners.

23. In Tajikistan, UN-Women has been working since 2003 to improve the gender responsiveness of land reforms by supporting women's land rights and broadening economic opportunities for rural women. In April 2012, the revision of the Land Code, including recommendations related to gender issues, was adopted by the Government of Tajikistan without reservation.

24. In Namibia, through the Support to Land Reform programme, the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement aims to distribute land fairly while protecting land rights. The programme promotes the registration of land rights in communal areas with specific measures to improve women's access to land and has provided training to up to 5,000 farmers. About 60,000 communal land titles have already been registered, so that the owners now possess official land-use rights certificates. Almost 50 per cent of the registered land titles are in women's names.

25. Following the food crisis in 2007 and 2008, an increase in demand for food and desire for food security, combined with a growing demand for biofuel and other commodities, encouraged large-scale acquisitions of land by foreign and domestic investors in developing countries. Over the past 10 years alone, millions of hectares of land have been leased in this fashion. This trend has dire implications for local communities, particularly for rural women, who are less likely than men to hold

[11] FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2012: Investing in Agriculture for a Better Future* (Rome, 2012).

formal land titles and more likely be in a weaker position to enter into negotiation and bargain with government authorities or investors on potential land deals that affect their communities and livelihoods.

26. Women in rural areas have the major responsibility for household water and energy supply. Surveys from 45 developing countries show that women and children bear the primary responsibility for water collection in the vast majority (76 per cent) of households. This time- and effort-consuming burden reduces their possibilities for education, decent work and political engagement and perpetuates the intergenerational transfer of poverty and disempowerment. In 12 per cent of households children bear the main responsibility for collecting water, with girls under 15 years of age twice as likely to bear this responsibility as boys under the same age.[12] Yet, water-related decision-making and management of infrastructure often exclude women, and gender considerations are often missing in the context of water management. UN-Women has recently become an official member of UN-Water, bringing gender dimensions and women's voices to the policy debate on water; advocating for gender mainstreaming in all governance and decision-making processes related to policy development, implementation and monitoring, service delivery and financing on water; influencing policy dialogue for universal access to water within the framework of the post-2015 development agenda; and advocating for the collection and analysis of relevant sex-disaggregated data.

27. With support from UN-Women and the Government of India, the Barefoot College of India has helped women from 28 countries to become leaders in creating alternative energy solutions for their remote, rural villages by providing training in installing, repairing and maintaining solar lighting. The training has enabled women to electrify households in their villages with solar lighting units and to play a key role in maintaining and replicating solar technology in their communities. As a result of the training from the College, women have built some 10,000 household solar lighting systems in remote villages globally and prevented the burning of several thousand litres of diesel and kerosene, which cause indoor and outdoor pollution and generate greenhouse gas emissions.

28. Access to financial services enhances economic development and can play a key role in reducing poverty in rural areas. However, access to credit, savings, insurance and remittance facilities is usually limited in rural areas, owing mainly to poorly developed infrastructure, higher risks and dispersed economic activity. Furthermore, capacity constraints at both the supply and the demand levels, such as the insufficient number of products tailored to rural needs and limited financial literacy, make the availability of financial services in rural areas even scarcer.

29. Many small farmers live in remote areas where the provision of financial services is virtually non-existent and production risks are very high. Women are often in a weaker position in terms of obtaining access to financial services owing to a number of conditions and difficulties, such as providing collateral, given existing land and property rights and cultural practices that discriminate against women regarding land and other productive assets.

[12] World Health Organization/United Nations Children's Fund Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, *Progress on Sanitation and Drinking Water: 2010 Update* (Geneva, 2010).

30. The recent financial crisis has tightened the provision of credit even further, but new products, often enabled by new technologies, have entered the marketplace and started to reach previously underserved segments of the population, particularly in rural areas. New technologies that facilitate electronic payment systems and branchless banking help to reduce transaction costs and overcome distance and infrastructure barriers. The success of mobile-phone-based money transfer and microfinancing services, such as M-PESA in Kenya or GCASH in the Philippines, represents only two of the best practices that have increased access to financial services to previously underserved individuals.

31. The World Bank, with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, developed the Global Financial Inclusion Database (Global Findex) to help measure how women and men in 148 countries, including the poor and rural residents, save, borrow, make payments and manage risk. Their research findings illustrate that more than 1.3 billion women around the world, the majority of whom reside in developing countries, are excluded from the formal financial system. Globally, 47 per cent of women and 55 per cent of men have an account at a formal financial institution. The gender gap increases when looking at data from the developing world, 37 per cent of women compared with 46 per cent of men, and is even larger when looking at adults living on less than US$ 2 a day, where women are 28 per cent less likely than men to have a formal account. At the regional level, the gender gap appears to be larger in South Asia, where 41 per cent of men report having an account and only 25 per cent of women do, compared with 27 per cent and 22 per cent for men and women, respectively, in sub-Saharan Africa and 23 per cent and 13 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa region.[13]

32. Challenges to improving financial inclusion in rural areas remain, but significant progress has also been made. Initiatives focused on investing in financial capability programmes aimed at improving rural people's skills and confidence to properly manage their finances have become more common, and the availability of a much richer and detailed set of data measuring the status of financial sector development worldwide is contributing to better-informed policymakers and stakeholders.

33. Several Member States have implemented initiatives and projects focused on promoting the financial inclusion of rural women and men. In Brazil, for instance, through the national agrarian credit programme, rural women and men owning limited amounts of land can have access to preferential financing solutions to buy rural property. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico and Paraguay, special credit lines are made available to rural women through initiatives focused on promoting the development of rural areas.

C. Employment, decent work and social protection

34. The General Assembly, in its resolution 66/129, called for ensuring equal access to productive employment and decent work, social services and appropriate social protection/social security measures, as well as integrating increased

[13] Asli Demirguc-Kunt, Leora Klapper and Dorothe Singer, "Financial inclusion and legal discrimination against women: evidence from developing countries", Policy Research Working Paper No. 6416 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2013).

employment opportunities for rural women into all international and national development and poverty eradication strategies. The Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189), adopted at the 100th session of the International Labour Conference, in 2011, represents a critical step forward in recognizing, valuing and protecting domestic workers, the vast majority of whom are women and girls from rural areas. The Convention had been ratified by seven countries as at 5 June 2013 and will enter into force in September 2013.

35. Agricultural and rural non-farm employment is critical for rural development, food security, poverty reduction and rural women's economic empowerment, yet decent and productive employment remains a challenge in rural areas, which are usually characterized by labour markets with high levels of informality, the prevalence of multiple-job-holding and casual work arrangements, labour force fragmentation and information asymmetries. Rural working conditions are often deficient, with very limited access to social protection. Labour legislation is often not enforced, and rural workers are the least organized and the least protected. Moreover, social dialogue is generally very weak.[14] Frequently in this context, the only options available to rural women are unpaid work and precarious agricultural wage labour.

36. The creation of decent employment opportunities in both the rural agricultural and non-agricultural sectors that provide rural women with a fair income, security in the workplace, social protection and the conditions for personal development is critical for poverty and hunger reduction and, more generally, for sustainable rural development.

37. Among agricultural workers, women are disproportionately represented in the unskilled segment of the workforce and are often hired without a formal contract and on a temporary or seasonal basis.[15] Despite the fact that women make up about 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, agriculture alone cannot reduce rural poverty.[16] Rural off-farm employment represents an opportunity to allow households to diversify their income sources and insure themselves against economic and environmental shocks that might affect agricultural production.

38. Many initiatives by Governments focus on improving the productive capacity of rural women and on diversifying their sources of income by providing business training and entrepreneurial skill development. For example, Paraguay promotes initiatives focused on strengthening entrepreneurship among women. Initially covering 1,500 women, the project is expected to reach 3,000 women by the end of November 2013. Colombia invested approximately $8,258 million pesos between 2011 and 2013 in support of entrepreneurial activities, benefiting 3,600 women. In Turkey, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Husbandry and the Union of Turkish Chambers of Agriculture signed a training cooperation protocol in 2012 to train rural women on agriculture, gender equality, violence against women, personal rights and freedom and to develop inter-institutional cooperation.

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[14] FAO, *Decent Rural Employment for Food Security: A Case for Action* (Rome, 2012).

[15] Report on women's rights and the right to food submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food (A/HRC/22/50).

[16] FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: Women in Agriculture — Closing the Gender Gap for Development* (Rome, 2011).

39. In Spain, the National Women's Institute is implementing initiatives that improve rural women's access to and use of information and communications technologies, particularly as a means to promote rural tourism and local products, as well as to create networks and share experiences and best practices. In addition, the Institute focuses on enhancing employment and social integration for rural women who face difficulties in finding jobs.

40. The rural development programme for 2007-2013 of the Government of Poland supported knowledge and best practice exchange and vocational training for women and men employed in agriculture and forestry, as well as diversification towards non-agricultural activities and the creation and development of microenterprises.

41. The Government of Cyprus facilitated the employment of economically inactive and unemployed people who struggle to enter and remain in the labour market, through an initiative in which participating businesses sign a 14-month contract that subsidizes 65 per cent of the labour cost of the person employed. In order to encourage citizens from rural areas to seek jobs, a subsidy is given to cover travel costs. So far, 330 contracts have been signed, 22 per cent with women in rural areas.

42. Through the Equality for Women Measure, Ireland provides social skills, education and training to enable urban and rural women to enter or return to the labour market; similarly, training on women and entrepreneurship is provided across the country to encourage more women to set up their own businesses and increase national recognition of Ireland's female entrepreneurs. Likewise, Botswana is supporting the participation of women entrepreneurs at international trade fairs as a tool to market their products.

43. In Nepal, UN-Women and IFAD, through a project focused on the economic security of women migrant workers, addressed the issue of reintegration of women migrant workers through the productive use of remittances and the creation of alternative livelihood opportunities. The project was implemented in three districts of Nepal and has directly benefited 736 women migrant workers and their families with entrepreneurship development training, while 1,500 returnees and their families have benefited from safe migration orientation.

D. Unpaid work

44. The General Assembly, in its resolution 66/129, called for investment in infrastructure and in time- and labour-saving technologies that benefit women and girls by reducing the burden of domestic activities, as well as for the inclusion of women's unpaid work in official statistics.

45. Rural women invest considerable amounts of time in unpaid activities related to food production and processing, water and fuel collection and child and elder care. Much of this work remains informal, usually performed within the family, and unremunerated, largely unrecognized and undervalued. Time spent by women and girls on domestic chores limits their opportunities to actively participate in the labour force, engage in economic activities or attend school. Furthermore, the heavy burden of unpaid care work diverts rural women's time away from farming and other income-generating activities, which in turns affects rural consumption,

investment and saving. Given that time poverty, as a consequence of unpaid household and care work, is one of the most critical factors hindering women's access to paid work in rural areas, investment in relevant infrastructure and in time- and labour-saving technologies is fundamental for rural women's economic empowerment.

46. These considerations are particularly critical given the current context of declining supplies of water and fuel linked to deforestation, desertification and climate change, which are increasing the projected number of people exposed to significant water and energy stress. Data indicate that in sub-Saharan Africa only 42 per cent of rural households live within 15 minutes of a source of drinking water, compared with 74 per cent of urban households.[17] On average, an adult woman is the person fetching and carrying water home in 63 per cent of rural households in sub-Saharan Africa, spending about an hour a day on the task, as is the case in Benin.[17]

47. Improvements in infrastructure services, especially water and electricity, and a wide range of sustainable energy technologies and other innovative techniques, including improved cook stoves, rainwater harvesting schemes, efficient grinding mills and other food-processing equipment, can help free up women's time spent on domestic and care work. Evidence shows that in Pakistan, the availability of water sources closer to homes was directly associated with increased time allocated to market work. In South Africa, rural electrification has increased women's labour force participation by about 9 per cent; in Bangladesh, it has led to more leisure time for women.[18] Solar Sister's project in sub-Saharan Africa encourages women's entrepreneurship by providing women with start-up kits in order to equip them to operate, maintain and sell solar technology, such as solar lamps, in their communities. The initiative not only allows entrepreneurs to double their household income but also contributes to reducing household expenses by 30 per cent when solar energy replaces kerosene. In Benin, the Solar Electric Light Fund's solar market utilizes solar-powered drip irrigation systems to help women farmers in remote, arid regions grow crops during the dry season. Thanks to drip irrigation, a proven efficient and labour-saving technology that delivers water directly to plant roots and facilitates simple and uniform fertilizer application, farmers can achieve higher yields over larger areas with less water and labour.

48. In Mozambique, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization has implemented the Joint Programme on Environmental Mainstreaming and Adaptation to Climate Change together with FAO, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and WFP. The Programme has installed renewable energy systems for drinking water, irrigation and electricity supply in seven different communities. In addition, the capacity of community members was developed through training on various issues, including the maintenance of the installed renewable energy systems. Through the provision of renewable energies and clean, accessible drinking water to marginalized communities, women's lives were transformed by lessening the burden of fetching unsafe water and increasing

[17] *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.XVII.11).

[18] World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington, D.C., 2011).

opportunities for income generation and other pursuits. Owing to the project's positive impact, the Government of Mozambique and the National Energy Fund replicated its best practices and rolled out the initiative in other rural communities.

49. Unpaid work carried out by rural women and girls often goes unrecognized and unnoticed in the calculations of a country's economy, since it is not included in labour force surveys or gross domestic product figures. Consequently, the realities of the consequences of women's and girls' work burdens are excluded from the data informing policymakers. Nevertheless, time-use studies provide a rich source of data on the differentiated roles of rural women and men and provide guidance to policymakers. In Brazil, for the first time, a pilot survey on time use was carried out with the aim of collecting data to inform policymakers and promote dialogue with civil society. In Colombia, in recognition of the need to make the unpaid work of urban and rural women visible, a law with the aim of incorporating unpaid work into the national accounting system was passed. Furthermore, with the support of several agencies, including the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, the United Nations Population Fund, UN-Women and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, various countries in Latin American and the Caribbean devised and implemented time-use studies.[19] A series of indicators to quantify care, including unpaid care, and support in the context of HIV/AIDS is currently being piloted in South Africa and Zambia.

50. In order to better understand the highly gendered arena of work in the water supply sector, the International Labour Organization and UN-Women are conducting a study of gender and informality in the water supply chain to identify trends in women's invisible and unpaid labour in the water sector, including case studies in three countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The study should support related advocacy during the International Year of Water Cooperation and other policy processes.

51. In 2012, UN-Women joined other United Nations agencies and several civil society organizations as partners in the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves. With the aim of improving livelihoods, empowering women and protecting the environment, the initiative helps to spread the adoption of clean cook stoves and sustainable fuel sources, recognizing that relying on inefficient cook stoves and scarce biomass for fuel disproportionately burdens women and girls, especially in rural areas. Launched in 2010, the Global Alliance is working towards the goal of 100 million households adopting clean cooking solutions by 2020.

E. Food nutrition and security

52. The *State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012*, jointly produced by FAO, IFAD and WFP, presented new estimates of undernourishment based on a revised and improved methodology, showing that progress in reducing hunger during the past 20 years was better than previously believed. However, eradicating hunger remains a major global challenge. Recent estimates provided by FAO suggest that some 868 million people around the world are undernourished in terms of energy

[19] Report of the Working Group on Gender Statistics of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Available from www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/5/44745/LCL3378i.pdf.

intake; approximately 26 per cent of the world's children are stunted and 2 billion people suffer from one or more micronutrient deficiencies. Available cross-country evidence on child nutritional status shows that, on average, children living in rural areas are less nourished than children living in urban settings. Furthermore, recent data compiled by the United Nations Children's Fund confirm that in 82 of 95 developing countries where data are available, there is a higher prevalence of underweight children in rural areas.[20]

53. In developing countries, rural women and men play different roles in guaranteeing food security for their households and communities. Women's roles usually focus on growing and preparing most of the food consumed and raising small livestock, while men tend to grow mainly field crops for the market. Yet, even though women are the main producers of food in many developing countries, inadequate or discriminatory legal and social structures and cultural norms prevent them from owning land and obtaining access to productive resources or agricultural extension services to fully contribute to food and nutrition security. Evidence indicates that if women's access to productive resources were equal to that of men, they could increase the yield on their farms by 20-30 per cent, raising the total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4 per cent, thus reducing by 12-17 per cent the number of hungry people in the world.[21]

54. Many national and international nutrition initiatives are increasingly acknowledging the critical importance of the first 1,000 days of children's lives, since developmental damage resulting from undernutrition during this time frame is irreversible. Increased recognition of gender roles within the food system has shown the relevance of women's control over resources and incomes in directly benefiting children's health, nutrition and education, as well as women's own health and nutritional status.[21]

55. Ensuring that school-age children are well nourished builds on the gains made in the crucial 1,000 days from conception to 2 years of age. School feeding programmes not only contribute to breaking the cycle of hunger but also encourage poor households to send their children to school. Over the past 45 years, WFP has provided support to school feeding programmes across the world; in 2012 alone, it provided school meals to 24.7 million children in 60 countries.[22]

56. In the current context of rapid population growth, the demand for food commodities is rising. Increased food production should be compatible with the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems, which are under extreme pressure from overexploitation and degradation. Changes in the availability of natural resources due to depletion or climate change can seriously compromise food security by further constraining women's capacities to produce, collect and prepare food. If sustainable agricultural development is to be translated into food and nutrition security, the active engagement of women is necessary. The availability of basic infrastructure and affordable technologies in rural areas combined with equal access to productive assets and the sustainable use of natural resources for small farmers, both women and men, including modern and

[20] FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2012*.

[21] FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011*.

[22] WFP, "Two minutes to learn about: school meals", fact sheet (2013). Available from http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/communications/wfp249632.pdf.

sustainable energy services and climate change adaptation measures, are fundamental to ensuring sustainable and productive agriculture.

57. FAO, UN-Women and WFP are working together in Liberia through the United Nations/Government of Liberia Joint Programme for Food Security and Nutrition. Within the initiative, UN-Women supports capacity strengthening on organizational and business development for women farmer groups. FAO and WFP provide training in marketing, food processing and nutrition, as well as agricultural inputs and labour-saving technologies. High-performing women's cooperatives are then connected to the WFP Purchase for Progress programme to sell their produce.

58. The outcome document adopted at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development emphasizes the need to revitalize the agricultural and rural development sectors in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner. Within a context of increased natural resource degradation, concerns over resources and sustainable agricultural practices need to be taken into account. The application of green farming practices at the small-farm level mitigates some environmental concerns and increases yields by between 54 and 179 per cent.[23] Many women-led projects have strong environmental components, as demonstrated by several projects across the world. In Kenya and Zimbabwe, women farmers are protecting and planting indigenous and medicinal plants, nurturing bee populations in arid areas and learning how to maintain them while processing trees and honey for sale. Women farmers in Fiji are implementing eco-friendly farming methods with the support of the Government. In Benin, environmentally sustainable methods of oyster harvesting have been adopted by local women with the aim of repopulating lagoons to provide sustainable livelihoods to local communities into the future.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

59. **Rural women continue to be socially and economically disadvantaged owing mainly to their limited access to economic resources and opportunities, their exclusion from decision-making and political participation and their disproportionate burden of unpaid work. Despite the recognition that rural women play an important role in the economic development of rural communities, further actions are needed to address factors that cause inequalities between rural women and men and between urban and rural women. The contributions that rural women provide to local and national economics, agriculture and farming, pastoralism, fishing and household livelihoods need to be fully acknowledged and valued, since they are prerequisites for women's social and economic empowerment, as well as for more inclusive and sustainable economic growth in general.**

60. **Member States and United Nations entities have taken measures to improve the situation of rural women with regard to expanding their access to employment, entrepreneurship and training, social participation, leadership opportunities, local services, productive resources, land rights and technologies. They have also taken steps to recognize the burden of unpaid care work on women. Despite great progress in improving rural women's status, the majority worldwide still live in difficult conditions. Moreover, the challenges that rural**

[23] UN-Women, *The Future Women Want: A Vision of Sustainable Development for All* (2012).

women face have been further amplified by the combined impact of the economic and financial crises, volatile energy and food prices, climate change, large-scale land deals, a lack of investment in rural and agricultural development and demographic changes.

61. Important progress has been made in many countries towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, in particular in reducing poverty, increasing people's access to improved sources of water and increasing access to primary education. Nevertheless, with only a few exceptions, rural women score lowest on all the Millennium Development Goals compared with women in urban areas and with rural and urban men.

62. Member States are encouraged to implement the following recommendations, presented for consideration by the General Assembly, to improve the situation of women in rural areas:

(a) Strengthen the implementation of all existing commitments on rural development and rural women's empowerment and rights, in particular the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(b) Strengthen policy environments aimed at prioritizing rural and agricultural development, as well as integrating and mainstreaming gender perspectives into rural, agricultural and development policies;

(c) Undertake legislative and administrative reforms to ensure women's equal access to economic resources, including land, and other assets;

(d) Support women smallholder farmers, including female-headed households in subsistence farming, by facilitating their access to extension and financial services, agricultural inputs, water sanitation and irrigation, market and innovative technologies;

(e) Mainstream gender considerations in natural resource governance, leverage the participation and influence of women in managing the sustainable use of natural resources and enhancing the capacities of Governments, civil societies and development partners to better understand and address gender issues in the management and governance of natural resources;

(f) Ensure and improve equal access to opportunities for decent employment in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, supporting and promoting opportunities in small enterprises, sustainable social enterprises and cooperatives; and take concrete measures to improve rural women's skills, productivity and employment opportunities through technical, agricultural and vocational education and training;

(g) Reduce the unpaid work burden of rural women by supporting improved access to infrastructure, services and time- and labour-saving technologies;

(h) Value and support the critical role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women, in the preservation, conservation and sustainable use of traditional crops and biodiversity for present and future generations as an essential contribution to food security and nutrition;

(i) Strengthen the capacity of national statistical offices and other relevant institutions to collect, analyse and disseminate sex-disaggregated data, including on time use, and gender statistics in rural areas to serve as a basis to inform policymakers and relevant stakeholders in policy design and strategy development in rural areas;

(j) Ensure that the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals take into account the empowerment of rural women.